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Research Memorandum
 RAR-45, November 17,

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TS authority to:
 TO : The Secretary
 FROM : S/S
 BY : Roger Hilsman

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SUBJECT: Prospects for Overthrowing Castro from Within

This paper examines cracks within the Castro regime and how the United States might exploit them. It is based on the assumption that, except for invasion, the only effective move to throw out Castro must come from within the regime itself. It further assumes that a Cuban mass revolt is unlikely, and that therefore the only force capable of expelling Castro lies within the regime.

Competing Groups within the Castro Regime

The two main components of the "Marxist-Leninist" regime in Cuba -- the old Communist Party members and the "new communist" fidelistas -- are subdivided into informal groupings that vary in their degree of commitment to the Soviet Union. Ranked from most to least committed, five groups can be singled out:

- 1) Moscow-oriented veteran Communists, probably including Blas Roca and Lazaro Pena as well as Anibal Escalante;
- 2) Pro-fidelista veteran Communists: those who owe greater allegiance to Fidel (and/or the Revolution) than to Moscow, including apparently Carlos Rafael Rodriguez;
- 3) Communist Fidelistas: Raul and Che Guevara, for example;
- 4) Pro-Communist Fidelistas: persons, not trained Communists, who find Communism very attractive and useful. Fidel is No. 1 in this group.
- 5) Leftist nationalists owing strong allegiance to Fidel who are "Communists" by circumstance rather than by conviction.

In the past year two lines of cleavage within this heterogeneous grouping have been observed: one that separates the trained, Moscow-oriented Communists (group 1) from the others, and one that separates the "leftist nationalist" fidelistas (group 5) from those more heavily tainted with Communism. The groups at the two extremes have, with Fidel's mediation, been able to get along. Fidel halted the old Communists' program for gaining control of all responsible positions in the regime's structure in early 1962, but he has not driven the

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old Communists out. The leftist-nationalist fidelistas still have grounds for resentment.

Given time and continued Soviet protection, odds are that the center groupings can forge a smoothly working coalition which will create a more monolithic regime by filling the government apparatus with the rising generation of recruits to communism.

The Leftist Nationalists in the Regime

The leftist nationalists in the regime constitute the only source for a coup and a break with the Soviet Union. They have less and less of a role in the new Cuba as long as it continues on its present course, and many of them have arms at hand.

We lack specific intelligence for a comprehensive picture of the names, numbers and power roles of regime supporters who dislike the Communist takeover of Cuba, but there are many indicators that displeasure exists. Numerous reports during 1962 rate displeasure in lower regime levels as widespread. Only in the Army is there much evidence of resentment at higher levels of authority. Lieutenants, captains and even majors (top rank in Cuba) have on occasion been reported as dissidents.

Resentment among the Army officers results from a three-way squeeze: 1) the old Communist thrust for control over the military; 2) Soviet takeover of critical military functions; 3) threat of displacement by indoctrinated young Communists. This unrest led internal resistance groups plotting a revolt during the summer to hope they might be joined by a large percentage of the Army.

However, in the four-year history of the regime, no coup plot has reached an advanced stage. Besides being deterred by the secret police and informer network, positive loyalty has kept leftist nationalists in the Army within the regime. Perhaps more than other groups, the military leaders -- old Sierra Maestra men -- owe personal loyalty to Fidel Castro, who put them where they are now. While he is the communizer of Cuba, he, oddly enough, still represents their bulwark against inundation by "the Communists", as he showed by checking the old Communist drive in early 1962. Trusting in him, they have accepted with a certain amount of difficulty the wisdom of his alignment with the USSR and, more easily, his hostility toward the US. So long as these feelings were fixed, action from this group has been unimaginable.

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Paving the Way for a Coup

Underpinning all elements in the regime has been confidence in Soviet power and will to protect Cuba, a belief steadily increasing since early 1960. The USSR's unilateral decision to withdraw its strategic missiles in the face of US pressure seriously shook that confidence. In the still fluid situation created by the missile crisis, those least committed to the Communist course of the Revolution might be brought to reject alignment with the Soviet Union as well as rejecting Castro and regime leaders should they continue to favor this alignment.

Implications for US Policy

If the above analysis of the situation is correct, it might be possible for the US to promote resistance within the regime and eventually coup action by moves along the following lines:

1) Creating an attractive alternative. Leftist nationalist action would depend upon the creation of an appealing alternative to the Soviet alliance and to support for Fidel. At present the leftist nationalists see no place for themselves in a post-Castro Cuba, which they feel either would be "recaptured" by the US for the exiles or dependent on the Soviet Union in the face of continued US hostility. The US would have to:

- a) convince them they could take charge of the Revolution after Castro;
- b) assure them that in exchange for breaking their dependent ties with the Soviets and reestablishing a national Revolution they would get immediate normalization of relations with the West -- perhaps through an OAS pledge.

2) Undermine Confidence in Soviet Protection. An important element in encouraging resistance would be the outcome of US-Soviet negotiations. The more the outcome weakens Cuban confidence in Soviet protection, the greater will be the effect in stimulating anti-Castro action within the regime. (See RSB 105, "Negotiations on Cuba: the Advantages of Stalemate," for a discussion of the implications of a failure to reach agreement on Cuba.)

US moves which lend themselves to being interpreted as concessions (e.g. cessation of overflights) extracted by Soviet negotiators would tend to confirm the "wisdom" of Cuba's present policies. On the other hand, certain military threats -- such as threat of invasion or actual exile raids -- would tend to draw regime supporters together, as they are still committed to the defense of Cuba against foreigners or "counter-revolutionaries."

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3) Undermining Faith in Castro's Leadership. Faith in Castro has been shaken in recent weeks because of his identification with the missile episode. His stubborn insistence on the "five points" is an effort to recover lost ground, and it opens him to a further setback as these are ignored or flouted by such US actions as the following:

- a) stepping up economic pressures through shipping blacklist and denial of markets;
- b) strengthening Guantanamo forces; and
- c) mobilizing additional OAS units in naval patrol operations.

Any weakening of Cuban confidence in Soviet support would contribute to reducing faith in Fidel. An OAS guarantee of normalized relations once Castro was withdrawn and Soviet ties cut would put a price on his head, help to isolate him, and build him up for the role of scapegoat.

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